

La Vérité Méconnue ('Truth Revealed), Grand Modèle

AIMÉ-JULES DALOU (French, 1838-1902)

Aimé-Jules Dalou was born in Paris in 1838. He began his artistic career as a student of Carpeaux and Duret at the École des Beaux-Arts, where he met Auguste Rodin. He debuted at the Paris Salon in 1861, exhibiting the piece *Dame Romaine Jouant aux Osselets* ('A Roman Lady Playing Jacks'). He then developed a highly personalised sculptural style, focusing on the depiction of female figures in day-to-day tasks. The success of such models was crowned when Dalou received critical acclaim and a third-class medal for the sculpture *Brodeuse* ('The Embroiderer'), at the Paris Salon of 1870.

The artist was a left-wing Republican, a political conviction that led him to flee Paris for London in the aftermath of the Franco-Prussian War (1870-1871) and of the subsequent political instability in France. During his time in London, Dalou was appointed as a tutor at the Lambeth Art School. Dalou's presence on British soil from 1871 represents a key moment for the development of sculpture in the country – his student cohort included important English artists such as William Goscombe-John, George Frampton and Harry Bates.

As the recent TATE Britain exhibition, *Impressionists in London* (2017-2018) highlighted, Dalou's contribution to the development of sculpture in Britain can be easily paralleled to the influence exercised by Monet, Tissot, Pissarro, Sisley and Derain on British painting in the late 19th Century. Although the artist returned to France in 1880, his artistic output outlived his stay in the country, occupying prominent spaces in the city and becoming a source of inspiration for the future generation of British sculptors, contributing to the foundations of the New Sculpture movement.

Upon his return to the French capital, all consideration of a French Monarchy had disappeared and Dalou could profess freely his Republican views, even submitting a design for a group entitled *Triomphe de la République* ('Triumph of the Republic', 1899), which was erected in Place de la Nation, where it can still be seen today.

In the last 20 years of his life, Dalou slowly drifted away from the depictions of day-to-day life which made his fortune in the early phases of his career, focusing on a project for a monument *Aux Travailleurs* ('Monument to Labourers'), which was never completed. He died in Paris in 1902, surrounded by friends and family.

BOWMAN SCULPTURE

The present model, known as *La Vérité Méconnue* or the *Truth Revealed*, belongs to a series of female nudes that Dalou produced between 1890 and 1900.

Dalou sculpted two versions of this model. In the first version, the sitter's hair is tied in a chignon and the mirror at her feet faces towards the front of the sculpture. In the second version the sitter's hair isn't tied and the mirror faces towards the back of the work.

Neither work was cast in bronze during Dalou's lifetime and it was only when the rights to the models were acquired by the Susse foundry in 1902 that they were cast in an unlimited edition. The first version was only ever cast in one (20.5cm) size. The second version was cast in two sizes (14cm and 35cm). The present work is a cast in the larger size of the second version.

The sculpture is initially seen as a woman with her head in her lap, sad at the reflection she has seen in the cast aside mirror at her feet. The deeper symbolism of the work was first suggested by Henriette Caillaux, the Parisian socialite and wife of the French Republican Prime minister Joseph Caillaux.

Caillaux interpreted the sculpture as a manifestation of Dalou's anger towards the French state for falsely imprisoning Alfred Dreyfus, the young Jewish army officer. In 1894 Dreyfus had been court-martialed and transported to the military prison known as 'Devil's Island' for allegedly delivering military defense secrets to the Germans. Dreyfus denied the charges, but was vociferously campaigned against by both militarists and Anti-Semites. After seven years of imprisonment, the case was tried again. Once again, he was found guilty, although this time offered an official pardon. Not prepared to leave his reputation tarnished, Dreyfus battled to have the verdict reversed and his name cleared. Eventually, he succeeded, when the proof of his innocence was found in captured German military documents. The traitor it turned out was a French Minister and Dreyfus had been used as a scapegoat.

In Caillaux's reading of *La Vérité Méconnue*, the woman symbolises France, hanging her head in shame at having falsely imprisoned such a young, talented and innocent man. Dalou himself was a staunchly left wing and as a member of the Paris Commune played an active part in the Republican party.

Other versions of *La Vérité Méconnue* are in the public collections of the Musée D'Orsay (Paris), the Petit Palais, musée des Beaux-arts de la Ville de Paris (Paris), the Musée des Beaux-Arts Montreal (Montreal).

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Literature

Amélie Simier, Jules Dalou: Le sculpteur de la République, exhibition catalogue, Petit Palais – Musées des Beaux-Arts de la Ville de Paris (Paris, 2013), pp. 390–1